HUMANISTS OF MINNESOTA
HUMANIST NEWS & VIEWS

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IN THIS ISSUE

2 President's Corner

3 Announcements
Discussion Groups

4 Darwin Month: Notes from the Galapagos

5 Caring Connection Corner
January Chapter Meeting Summary

6 Highlights from the Bd

7 Contact Information
More Discussion Groups

Saturday
February 18th, 2017

Monthly Chapter Meeting

First Unitarian Society
900 Mt. Curve Avenue
Minneapolis

Doors open at 10:00 a.m.
Program 10:20 a.m.-Noon

HUMANISM:

A better life for all through education, democracy, free speech, reason, and science, without reliance on arbitrary dogmas, revelations, and faith.

Chapter Meeting:

Animal Ethics and Naturalism

With Professor Jeff Johnson

Saturday, February 18th, 2017

Darwin Day has become an important event within the humanist community in the past couple of decades. While the actual day to commemorate Darwin's birth--February 12th -- will already have passed, we traditionally pay tribute to Darwin at our February chapter meetings. We'll have door prizes (win a Darwin bobble-head!) and hear a thought-provoking talk on animal ethics and naturalism by philosophy professor Jeff Johnson from St. Catherine University.

In this talk, Dr. Johnson will explore ways in how naturalistic ethics leads us to reexamine our relationship with nonhuman animals. He will discuss a few of the prominent positions and arguments secular philosophers have offered on both sides of the ethical issue of eating animals, and will critically examine some of the common defenses offered in favor of eating animals.

Dr. Johnson teaches a wide range of courses, including Ethics, Food Ethics, Environmental Ethics, Biomedical Ethics, Logic and interdisciplinary courses with colleagues on Animal Ethics, Asian Philosophy and Effective Altruism. His main aim in teaching is to help students see how philosophy connects with their lives outside the classroom.

Dr. Johnson is co-president of the Society for the Study of Ethics and Animals, the program committee chair for the North American Wittgenstein Society, and the faculty advisor for the St. Kate's student group Advocating for Animals. Dr. Johnson is on the board of Compassionate Action for Animals and he's a member of the Humane Society of the United States Minnesota State Council where he focuses on farm animal issues. Ω

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

There was an election, and an inauguration. Then a transition of governmental power. Followed immediately thereafter with some mammoth marches. *Wow!* Many kinds of power have been on display the past few weeks. Power is a fact of life; it is neither good nor bad in and of itself. It all depends on how it is used. Certainly it gives one pause that now one of the most powerful people on the planet is a person of such disreputable character. But as recent events demonstrate, we all have power and now is not the time to relinquish it. As Yoda says: "Do . . . or do not. There is no try."

At this telling moment in American democracy, the power of human agency is being expressed in mind-boggling ways. Like it or not, Trump galvanized lots of people to step up and use their latent power to outwit and defeat the entrenched political establishment. In a pre-inaugural speech, Trump referred to his supporters as "the forgotten" and vowed that they would be forgotten no more.

Eight years ago, Barack Obama fired up millions of people—many who also felt forgotten, disenfranchised or dismissed--and encouraged them to exercise their power. But Obama never lived up to the expectations of those who voted for him. The tremendous "people power" that propelled Obama to the presidency was not magically conferred upon him in taking the oath of office—as too many people imagined would happen. Those who did not share the values of the Obama administration acted tirelessly and relentlessly to make sure he would accomplish little. Though many worked diligently to support Obama's agenda, in the end, it was not enough to counter-balance the force of the opposition.

Democracy functions through the power-sharing of those who take human agency seriously. Remember Yoda—"Do…or do not. There is no try." A one-time vote is not enough to maintain an inclusive and healthy democracy. And a one-time march, however large, is not enough to sustain a movement. Power is only as good as the quality and consistency of those who own it. Everyone who exerts their power of human agency with the skills, effort, oratory, and yes—even money—with which they have been endowed helps determine the course of our common life. Democracy, by its very nature, is power-sharing and power-balancing among those who participate.

Ah, and there's the catch—participation. In the U.S., when people feel aggrieved by circumstances beyond their control, some can be motivated by the right leader to exercise their civic duty—to vote—from time to time. Many of us argue that too many people are unjustly denied the right to vote, but it is most certainly true that even more, having that right, never bother using it. And then, most people relinquish their power after they do vote. Too few take up the discipline of democracy. History proves over and over again that the race belongs to the tactical and the tenacious—whether it be in ending slavery or war-mongering, advancing women's rights, civil rights, workers' rights or environmental protections.

Star Wars is perhaps not the right allegory for our times. In the real world, it is not enough for a Luke Skywalker to embrace his power of "the force." Or even a Princess Leah her power. A strong leader is important but only a part of the story. When we set our goals to make a world where all can thrive, everyone must be engaged in the work. Continuously and cooperatively--like an ant colony or bee hive. The campaign does not end when a leader is chosen; it is but the beginning of the work that lies before us. Whether it be to support or thwart the leader of the day.

A better story to inspire us might be the old folktale—The Tortoise and the Hare. To live with greater purpose for the long haul, one must have the mindset of the Tortoise--and not the Hare who is unduly impressed with his speed and agility. Human agency entails many attributes and each of us must contribute what we can to maintain a healthy and thriving society. Humanism not only embraces the dignity and worth of everyone but also affirms our ability and responsibility to affect ethical change in our lives and world. Democracy is collective human agency in action; it is not entertainment, spectator sport or self-aggrandizement.

The way forward, however, need not be as hard as some might imagine in these times. Many good organizations have been doing the work of compassion and justice and democracy and environmentalism and sustainability for a long time. We don't have to re-invent the wheel to get the world moving in a better direction. But more of us do need to take up our own mantle of power to help shoulder the work. Our community of humanists can and should join forces with other advocacy groups on our shared goals. Let's challenge that hare! Let's do it now! Ω

Announcements

DISCUSSION GROUPS ETC.

2nd Friday, 5:00 p.m., *Humanist Happy Hour St. Paul,* Green Mill Restaurant & Bar, 57 Hamline Ave S.
4th Friday, 5:00 p.m., *Humanist Happy Hour Minneapolis,* Pizza Luce, 800 W. 66th St., Richfield
2nd Friday, 10:00 a.m., *Coffee and Current Events,* Loring Park Dunn Bros., 329 W. 15th St., Mpls.
2nd Saturday, 10:30 a.m., *Blasphemers' Brunch***,** Pizza Luce, 800 W 66th Street, Richfield
2nd Sunday, 11:00 a.m., *Sunday Assembly.* 514 Lowry Ave. NE, Minneapolis.
1st Sunday, 9:00 a.m.-noon, *Lake Superior Freethinkers monthly meeting.* Radisson Hotel Duluth, Viking Room. For information contact Bill van Druten, (218) 724-4176.
1st Sunday, 10:00 a.m., *Central Minnesota Freethinkers, St. Cloud Coffee Social.* Check their website for details*: cmfreethinkers.org* or contact them at *info@cmfreethinkers.org*
Mondays, 5:00-6:30 p.m., *Atheists for Human Rights Happy Hour,* Ol' Mexico Restaurant, 1754 Lexington Ave., Roseville (just north of Larpenteur). Tables on terrace level. Call Paul Craven, (763) 788-8918.
1st and 3rd Mondays, 6:30 p.m., *Freethought Toastmasters Club*, Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Ave. W., St. Paul. Contact George Kane, nup@minn.net or (651) 488-8225.
2nd & 4th Mondays, 5:00-7:00 p.m., *Freethought Dinner Social*, Davanni's, 8605 Lyndale Ave So, Bloomington. Call Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.
1st Tuesday, 11:30 a.m.—1:00 p.m., *Freethought Lunch,* Dragon House, 3950 Central Ave. NE, Columbia Heights, MN. Call Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.
3rd Wednesday, 11:30 a.m., *Freethought Lunch*, Dragon House, 3950 Central Avenue NE, Columbia Heights. Call Bill Volna, (612) 781-1420.
2nd Thursday, evening, *Rochester Area Freethinkers (RAFT),* Downtown Rochester Public Library, Meeting Room A. Contact Jim Salutz, jsalutz@aol.com or (507) 280-8012.

OTHER EVENTS

2nd Wednesday, 7 p.m., *Humanists of Minnesota* Board of Directors meeting. Open to all members. Contact Audrey Kingstrom at akingstrom@comcast.net.
Thursdays, 7:00 p.m. (during school year), *Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists (CASH)* general meeting. 3rd floor Coffman Memorial Union, 300 Washington Ave. SE, Minneapolis. Contact cash@cashumn.org.

Check out our Meetup events at http://www.meetup.com/humanism-166

Humanists of Minnesota 2016 Financial Summary

By Brad Bolin, Treasurer

Income		**$ 15,553**
Dues	$ 7,501	
Fundraisers	$ 4,815	
Lunch with Humanists	$ 1,064	
Donations	$ 1,961	
Interest	$ 44	
Misc. Income	$ 168	
Expenses		**$ 13,596**
Administrative	$ 1,050	
Solstice Banquet	$ 8	
Program Events	$ 3,335	
Community Outreach	$ 1,572	
Media	$ 2,641	
Fundraisers	$4,990	
Operating Gain (Loss)		**$ 1,957**

Membership Update

As of January 2017, Humanists of Minnesota Membership is at 205 (a 12% increase over last year!) We have 2976 followers on Meetup.com (a 31% increase) and 261 friends on Facebook (a 35% increase).

Support Humanists of Minnesota! Painlessly!

Do you shop at Amazon.com?

If so, Amazon will donate some of their profits to Humanists of Minnesota! Just use the following URL to enter their website when you shop there (note: though the charity listed is the AHA, the funds will go to HofMN):
http://smile.amazon.com/ch/41-1570800

"Humanist Views," our weekly Cable program, airs at **6:30 p.m. Mondays** on MTN Channel 75.

February is Darwin Month!

Notes from the Galapagos

by Nathan Curland

This past December I was able to take a trip to South America and spend a week in the Galapagos Archipelago, best known for having been visited by a young Charles Darwin in 1835. During that week I and the other people on the tour lived, ate and traveled on a small "yacht" (the Yolita II) which went from island to island visiting different harbors and coves along the way. At the various locations we disembarked and were thereby able to experience the local geology, fauna and flora for ourselves. The trip was part of a Road Scholar package and was limited to 16 participants. This last point is significant since the Galapagos is a 97% World Heritage Site and the Ecuadorian government strictly controls who can tour it (all visitors who tour the islands must have a guide). Boats with 16 passengers or less have broad access to many of the coves and islands whereas larger ships do not.

__ Route of the Yolita II

The most striking aspect of the Islands is the geology. The night before we left Quito (the capital of Ecuador) for the Galapagos, we had a lecture by world-renowned geologist, Theofolis Toulkeridis , who explained to us how these volcanic islands were formed. The archipelago is only about 10,000 years old and sits on the Nazca plate, which is moving slowly south-eastward toward (and underneath) the South American plate. Every thousand years or so, cracks in the lithosphere permit the lava plume beneath the Nazca plate to push the earth up, erupt and create a new volcano. If enough time has passed since the previous eruption, a new island is formed.

Nothing can prepare you for the first sight of the islands. The shorelines, for the most part, are rocky volcanic formations and rocks with beaches residing in coves that have been carved out by the ocean currents and waves. This combined with the constant winds over much of the landscape results in a mostly arid climate with vegetation reminiscent of the southwestern United States deserts; cacti and other arid climate plants are plentiful. To set this off in many places, if you travel inland a bit from the shore, there are mangrove lagoons which are home to sea fowl, sea lions, and penguins. Or if you travel up some of the larger volcanoes you can enter nearly tropical rainforest conditions due to the heavy mists that form at those elevations. Due to the highly arid conditions, fresh water is not easily found. That, plus governmental restraints have limited human settlement to 3% of the land. There are some plantations which mostly reside up the sides of volcanoes that have the high moisture regions discussed above.

Of course, what draws the tourists and visitors is the wildlife. Seabirds nest and inhabit the shores of nearly every island. The best known are the boobies, large web-footed birds that, along with the pelicans, search for fish from heights approached 70-100 feet and then perform spectacular dives into the sea to catch their prey. Many an early morning was spent on the upper deck of our boat watching this daily display. Other large seabirds include majestic frigates, swallow-tailed gulls, flightless cormorants, pelicans and Galapagos penguins. Sea lions, marine iguana, crabs and sea turtles are everywhere. (We snorkeled nearly every day and were able to get close to many.) On land, mockingbirds, owls, hawks and finches (of course!) can be found, along with land iguana, tortoises, flamingos and small lizards. An interesting feature of all the wildlife was how accustomed they were to humans and we were able to easily get within a foot or two of nearly any animal/bird we approached.

The highlight of the trip was the visit to the Giant Tortoise Breeding Ground. This is a large facility on the island of Isabela where giant tortoises from the different islands are brought to breed. The resultant eggs are carefully nurtured in a hatchery and the young cared for until they can be re-released into the wild. This is done to try and bring the tortoise population back up from the devastation it suffered during the 18th through early 20th centuries when sailors, whalers and pirates used the Islands as provisioning posts with the giant tortoises as a primary food source.

Nearly every evening we received a lecture from our tour guide, Edgar, about some aspect of the islands, their history or about Darwin and the ship he sailed on, the Beagle. During the week, we visited many islands and coves in the archipelago, in some cases overlapping Darwin's visit. However, Darwin, it turned out, only visited four of the islands (and only two of those we visited). He was very prone to seasickness and the ship's captain, Robert FitzRoy, would many times leave him on shore to explore and collect samples, while the

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ship's crew concentrated on their main task of creating accurate maps of the archipelago. Also of interest is that Darwin thought of himself first as a geologist and a biologist second (having read Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* which FitzRoy gave him as a welcome present) and took many more geological samples than fauna/flora samples. In fact, it wasn't until near the end of the Beagle's time in the Galapagos that he started to think about the variation he saw among the fauna from island to island and how they compared to species he saw on the South American continent. He had even failed to keep complete notes on which islands his samples came from and, when he returned to England, had to rely on others to send him well-documented samples to assist him in laying the groundwork for his theory on the origins of species. (The Beagle was in the Galapagos for only 5 weeks: September 15, - October 17, 1835.)

I was fortunate to find a book in the ship's informal "library" entitled *Darwin in Galapagos* (by Thaia and Estes, Princeton University Press, 2009) which I read during the week and which helped me really appreciate everything I was seeing and experiencing as well as understand what Darwin got right (and what he got wrong!). I highly recommend it to those interested.

Though the trip to Galapagos was only a week, the days were well-filled with activities, learning, and good company. It was definitely a voyage worth taking. Ω

Humanist Community:

Caring Connection Corner

The Caring Connection Corner is a place for members to share with our community. It's a space to share good news, life events, health updates, and times of need. Communities flourish with openness and support, so let's unite in celebrations and difficult times. If you have an update you'd like to share (for yourself or on behalf of another), please send it to editor@humanistsofmn.org.

After taking a fall in her home about a month ago, Deb Nasby has taken up residence at the Masonic Transitional Care Center in Bloomington. She seriously damaged a ligament in her knee and required surgery to repair it. The surgery went well on January 16th at Abbott-Northwestern and now she is back at Masonic where she continues physical therapy until she is strong enough to go home.

She would be happy to receive calls on her cell-phone at 612-735-4455. Leave a voicemail if no answer. Ω

January Chapter Meeting

Cuba and Its People

Summary and Commentary by Nathan Curland

32 members and friends came to the January Chapter meeting to hear Professor August Nimtz and Nancy Albrecht talk to us about Cuba. This topic has become of increasing interest to Americans as a result of the recent "normalization of relations" process initiated by President Obama.

August Nimtz is a Professor of Political Science at the University of Minnesota and a member of the Minnesota Cuba Committee. He discussed Cuban-American Relations since the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Nimtz began by noting that the normalization process that has started affects just Diplomatic Relations. Still in place is the embargo (which only Congress can repeal) and, what he referred to as the "information blockade" which has "prevented Americans from knowing what is happening in Cuba". Furthermore, he is uncertain of what will happen to normalization with the incoming Trump administration.

Nimtz noted that, in his view, the top obstacles to further normalization of relations are (note that all are placed at the feet of the U.S. government):

Status of Guantanamo Bay, which was occupied by U.S. forces in 1892 (Spanish-American War).

- The continuing "destabilization" program; these are anti-communist broadcasts into Cuba from American radio stations.
- The Cuban Adjustment Act. This act permits any Cuban that reaches U.S. soil to apply for citizenship after being in the country for one year. Note: the Obama administration ended this policy in January 2017, but the future of this act under Trump is not clear.

(Continued on page 6)

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- The Embargo. There was some easing by the Obama administration but people still cannot go as tourists but only on special visas for educational, religious etc. purposes. Furthermore, the economic embargo continues.

Nancy Albrecht is a member of the Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis. She first visited Cuba in 2005 on a religious visa and has visited every year since. She described the changes she has seen in Cuba over that time:

In 2005 her group visited with the local Communist Party group in the city they stayed in and spent hours exchanging ideas of how the two societies lived. After a number of years the need to have these discussions vanished. She noted that internet access was an issue, with private home internet being prohibited. Wi-fi hot-spots draw many people but are relatively expensive for the average Cuban, as is regular telephone service.

Albrecht said a significant move in 2000 was the ability of Cuban Americans to send up to $2,000 to relatives in Cuba; this had a direct effect on the Cuban economy. Furthermore, in 2011 the Cuban government changed property laws and permitted Cubans to own land; this also increased economic activity. In addition, some private businesses are now permitted in the service sector which are drawing more customers than government sponsored entities due to better customer service.

Albrecht also discussed some problems. Constructing new buildings is an issue due to a dearth of building materials. People continue to leave the island and she gave a couple of stories of people persecuted by the government for their past political affiliations.

Though I generally try to keep my chapter meeting summaries to the facts of what was presented, in this case I must make some comments which reflect my opinion of the tone of the presentations:

Professor Nimtz's talk came off as heavily biased and his socialist viewpoint was clearly on display. He basically blamed all of Cuba's problems, especially the poverty of its people, on U.S. government policies over the past 56 years and on capitalism, ignoring any effect of the communist policies of the Cuban government. He also named American racism as a prime driver of these problems noting that the majority of the inhabitants "are colored" whereas most of those that left Cuba "are white". He praised the Cuban government for its focus on health and the aid they have sent to high profile disasters around the world (ignoring the P.R. value as well as the huge contributions by non-governmental agencies). During the Q&A when asked about the prospects of democracy in Cuba (currently there is only one party and political dissent is not permitted) he deflected the question to a critique of democracy in the U.S. When pressed, he admitted the lack of civil liberties but countered that the citizens of any country under siege will agree to "limit those rights". Furthermore, he believes that what he called "social rights" are more important than civil rights.

Albrecht, on the other hand, had a much more balanced approach to Cuba's problems. She noted the recent rise in the Cuban economy when a limited amount of free market activities were permitted. When asked about education she responded that there is much concern that "teachers don't teach" and that although most cities have universities built near them, the campus near the one she was in, was fairly empty.

After the talk, about half the assemblage stayed for an excellent Cuban-themed lunch from Victor's 1959 Café, catered by Mark Thoson. Ω

Highlights from the Board

by David Guell
Secretary

From the January board meeting:

- The board voted 5-0 to approve reimbursing up to $320 (total) to send two members to the Nonprofit Communications and Technology Conference on February 21.
- The board selected Columbia Park as the location for the 2017 summer picnic.
- The board unanimously approved Audrey's motion expressing support of Chris Stedman's effort to establish a Humanist Center in Minneapolis. Audrey also moved to submit an AHA grant proposal to support that work, which was approved 4-1.
- David reported his findings concerning the MembershipWorks CRM system and Rohit reported on his work concerning email distribution of the newsletter.

HUMANIST NEWS & VIEWS

Editor, Nathan Curland
Editorial Committee - Harlan Garbell, Suzanne Perry, Mahad Muhammad, Nathan Curland

Articles, letters, event notices and other writings are welcome. Send to: *editor@humanistsofmn.org* with the word "newsletter" in the subject line, or to P.O. Box 582997, Minneapolis, MN 55458-2997. (E-mail submissions are preferred.) All submissions must include the writer's full name, postal address, telephone number and e-mail address. All submissions become the property of this newsletter and cannot be returned. Submission deadline is the 23rd of the prior month.

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Upcoming Critical Thinking Club Meetings

Twin Cities Chapter: Sunday, February 5th, 10:00 a.m. to noon: "Conversation About the Future of Minnesota," by Rebecca Otto, MN State Auditor. Augsburg College, Christensen Center 1st Flr, 720 22nd Ave S., Minneapolis.

Stillwater Chapter. Monday, February 13th, 7:00 p.m.: "Minnesota Legislative Battles" by Senator John Marty. Family Means Bldg., 1875 Northwestern Ave, Stillwater.

West Metro Chapter: Saturday, February 25th, 10:00 a.m. to noon: "The War on Science," by Shawn Otto. RidgePointe Senior Apartments, 12600 Marion La. W, Minnetonka.

Maple Grove Discussion Group:

Saturday, February 11th, 10:00 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.: "The Minnesota Sex Offender Program," with Prof. Eric Janus, Mitchell-Hamline Law School. Maple Grove Community Center, 12951 Weaver Lake Rd, room 133, Maple Grove 55311, $5 donation. Register at landforsale@visi.com or call Laurie at (763) 420-6350.

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February 2017

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL

Your membership is vital to the growth of Humanism and the Humanist community. Our membership categories are:
(For categories at RH and above, married couples or domestic partners will be considered as one membership, if you so indicate.)
( ) (B) Budget, $25.00
( ) (RI) Regular Individual, $40.00
( ) (RH) Regular Household, $60.00
( ) (S) Sustaining, $100.00
( ) (P) Patron, $250.00
( ) (BN) Benefactor, $500.00
( ) (L) Life Membership, $1000.00
( ) (T) Trial subscription for 3 months, just ask
*Full time students at an accredited institution can receive a complimentary subscription

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For national or international membership write to:

American Humanist Association
1777 T Street NW
Washington, DC 20009-7125
www.americanhumanist.org

Council for Secular Humanism
PO Box 664
Amherst, NY 14226
www.secularhumanism.org

Please check the appropriate box, complete the information and mail with your check to Humanists of Minnesota, P.O. Box 582997, Minneapolis, MN 55458-2997.

Name: _____

Address:_____

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Phone number:_____

e-mail:_____
(for special announcements, blogs etc. Keeps you in touch!)

I would like my newsletter sent via email ( ) (in color!)

Second Member at same address (for RH and above):

_____

Visit our website at:
www.humanistsofmn.org